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# Russia and the European security order revisited: from the congress of Vienna to the post-cold war

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## ABSTRACT

Russia's role in the international order is often explained with reference to historical examples, analogies and *longue durée* trends. This article examines Russia's role in, and visions of, the international order from the Congress of Vienna to the end of the Cold War. The article also discusses the lessons, and perhaps also the wrong lessons, that the current Russian leadership and elite have drawn on the basis of past grand bargains. It concludes that in the course of history, there has been more variation than continuity in Russia's policy towards the European security system and, moreover, that the post-Cold War security order in Europe was not imposed on Russia during the years immediately following the end of the Cold War.

## KEYWORDS

Russia; international order; security order; European security

## 1. Introduction

Russia's role in and views on the international order is an old topic, but it has become relevant again in the context of the debates over the fate of the post-Cold War liberal international order. Since the Ukraine crisis and annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia's role in the European security system has been a particularly contested issue (see, e.g. Clunan, 2018; Hill, 2018; Jankovski, 2017; Kanet, 2018; Morozov, 2015; Radin & Reach, 2017; Romanova, 2018; Sakwa, 2017; Voskressenski, 2016). At the risk of oversimplification, one can distinguish between three positions in the ongoing debate: for some, Russia is a revolutionary or revisionist power intent upon destroying the present order; for others, it is an anti-reformist conservative force seeking to restore order; and for still others, it lies somewhere in between and seeks only minor adjustments (for an overview, see the introductory article by Götz and Merlen, 2018).

Although assessments of Russia's role in the European security order are politically sensitive, classifying states and their strategies in accordance with certain categories has been part and parcel of the study of International Relations from the beginning, and is also common in historical studies of Russian and Soviet foreign policy. Indeed, many scholars and pundits contend that history plays an essential role in today's struggle over the

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international order. The past provides us with many analogies for the present. Moreover, past experiences motivate states in their attempts to shape the international order, and some may also perceive perennial historical trends – particularly in Russia's attitude towards the global order – which explain the Kremlin's current behaviour (Kotkin, 2016; Rieber, 2007). Hence, it is important to examine the role played by Russia and its visions of the international order during past centuries. In revisiting such history, this article focuses on major peace conferences and summits where principles guiding the international order have been negotiated.

Many generalisations concerning Russia's world order policy can and have been made on the basis of history. Numerous observers argue that Russia's approach to security governance represents a state-centric worldview and emphasises great-power management and multipolarity rather than liberal principles (see, e.g. Chebankova, 2017; Kobayashi, 2017; MacFarlane, 2003; Makarychev, 2009; Miskimmon & O'Loughlin, 2017). It is also widely understood that Russia wants to be part of the international society (Aalto, 2007). However, views differ on the degree to which Russia has promoted general principles, or just its narrow self-interests. The Russian view, as Putin (2013) has argued, is that Russia's 'winning strength in critical junctures such as Vienna or Yalta has manifested in generosity and justice.' Others see Russia as merely being guided by parochial self-interest in these and similar situations. Some argue that tempting opportunities prompt Russia's greed (Mastny, 1979, p. 7), while others believe that when Russia is recognised as a great power it tends to act more cooperatively (Tsygankov, 2012).

Although Russia's views on the international order and its attempts to shape it have been much discussed, there are several reasons for revisiting the issue. First, existing research is always anachronistic to a certain degree as new questions arise when new contrasts are presented. New narratives and myths start to live a life of their own if historical turning points and trends are not critically explored. Second, new material is emerging related to the post-Cold War era and hence the period merits much closer and systematic attention than has been possible thus far. Third, in light of the recent debates in social theory focusing on microfoundations (see, e.g. Kertzer, 2017), it is important to rethink the question of order from the perspective of agency, without which the impact of structural forces cannot be understood (Wendt, 1987). In this way, we can see how the creation and deterioration of order is related to diplomatic practice, interpretation and (mis)perception, rather than resulting simply from structural forces or rational choices based on national interests, however they are defined.

In this article, I examine Russia's role in the evolving European security order firstly from a historical perspective, beginning with some theoretical and conceptual notes. In the second section, I provide a macro-historical analysis of Russia's role from the Napoleonic Wars to the Yalta Conference, while the third section deals more specifically with the formation of the post-Cold War order in Europe after the Soviet Union's dissolution. The sources consist mainly of secondary research literature with regard to the earlier centuries, but I have also used material retrieved from the archives of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs from 1989 to 1993 as far as the immediate post-Cold War era is concerned. Both the space constraints of this article and the challenge of studying each historical juncture in detail following the strict principles of critical historiography mean that the narrative presented here remains sketchy. The available evidence is sufficient, however, to demonstrate

that there has been significant variation in Russia's overall strategy concerning international order.

## 2. Theoretical background and research design

Russia's role in the European security order needs to be discussed within a larger theoretical framework. Realists, liberals and constructivists differ in their views on how international order in general and the European security order in particular is created and recreated. Simply put, realists emphasise the role of power, liberals the preferences of key players and the overall framing of deals as win-win situations, and constructivists stress the role of shared beliefs and principles. The end of the Cold War is crucial here because realists see it simply as a power shift, liberals as the domestic political transformation of the Soviet Union, whereas constructivists insist that it depended on changing beliefs considering normative principles rather than coercion or trade-off. Shared beliefs do not necessarily lead to the best possible security order, however. Moreover, once accepted, beliefs start to become rather rigid and are not open to bargaining (see, e.g. Sarotte, 2009). With regard to changes in power relations, an important issue is the ability to conceive of power as a social construction too. In negotiations, power depends on perceptions and shared beliefs rather than directly on material conditions. Thus, psychological factors such as perceptions and emotions are regarded as a necessary layer here, without which the structural conditions would not have any explanatory power (see, e.g. Jervis, 2016).

The theoretical perspectives also differ in terms of the overall historical evolution of international security orders. Realists believe that, in the long run, there is no qualitative improvement in the nature of international order. Development is more cyclical than linear (Clark, 1989). In contrast, liberals (and many constructivists too) believe that the overall evolution of international order has been, despite occasional setbacks, towards a more progressive system encompassing a wider and more just set of principles (Ikenberry, 2000). In relation to today's problems, one should ask whether there has been a steady growth in liberal principles constituting the international order, not solely tied to the US leadership, and what kind of underlying deeper forces have driven the progress through the centuries and have now apparently ceased to have an effect. Are the current problems of the liberal order determined by political, economic, technological and cultural trends? Or can they be ascribed to more contingent variables, such as leaders, diverse domestic political factors and other ephemeral issues?

At this juncture, we should also consider the role of historical memory in creating and accepting security orders. Security orders are usually created on the basis of past experiences, seeking to avoid the mistakes of the previous order, rather than being constructed from scratch. But the lessons learned are often more national than international. This is particularly relevant in the case of Russia, since historical lessons very strongly pervade current reasoning (see, e.g. Cox, 2014). For this reason, we need to look at the 'history of lessons' along with lessons of history (Rasmussen, 2003).

Russia has been both a maker as well as a taker of the rules upon which the international order is based. Realists would therefore assert that when Russia has been negotiating over or attempted to influence the European security order, the key has been its self-interest and its success has mainly been contingent upon its relative power position.

Yet self-interest is an elusive concept. The 'self' can be defined as 'the Kremlin', 'the Russian state' or, more broadly, as covering the imperial 'self' beyond the borders of the existing nation-state, perhaps even encompassing humanity as a whole. Interests, moreover, can be short-term and myopic or long-term and enlightened. Or, as Arnold Wolfers (1965, pp. 73–74) famously pointed out, states can define their key goals reflecting narrow self-centric aims (possession goals) or wider general visions (milieu goals). It is important to note here that the latter are not necessarily liberal and the former not necessarily realist.

Finally, there are manifold ways of categorising state policies related to international order in the existing literature. Kalevi Holsti (1991, p. 348), for example, identifies three strategies for forging major peace settlements and postwar orders: domination, balance of power, and transformation of the system. Jeffrey Legro (2005, pp. 8–10) distinguishes between three great-power strategies for international order: revisionist, integrationist, and separatist. Brian Rathbun (2014) differentiates between a variety of diplomatic styles, ranging from coercive statecraft to more cooperative dialogue. In keeping with such conceptual categories, Russia's role in, and perception of, the international order can be compared to other great powers. At the same time, it can also be analysed in terms of historical continuity and variation. The question thus is: When looking at Russia's policy towards the European security order in the past as well as today, is it possible to discern any pattern on this basis? In the next section, I will examine Russia's key objectives towards international security arrangements, institutions and principles at major historical junctures, addressing how narrowly or broadly they were defined and what kind of lessons Russians have drawn from these historical events.

### 3. Russia and the historical evolution of the European order

Russia was not a party to the Westphalian peace treaties constituting the European state system nor the Peace of Utrecht after the Spanish succession wars. Instead, it fought first the Ingrian and then the Great Northern War against Sweden and participated in the three partitions of Poland with Prussia and Austria in the late eighteenth century. Subsequently, it became one of the key actors in the Vienna Congress system after the Napoleonic Wars. Similarly, Russia – or Soviet Russia – once again did not take part in the negotiations over the European security order after WWI, but re-entered the European security system in the 1920s and then played a key role in the formation of the post-WWII – that is, the Cold War – security order. It is interesting to revisit this history since it offers many clues for analysing the present situation. Although this has been done to some extent already (see Tsygankov, 2012), there are plenty of questions that can be asked anew. The objective of this article is not only to create an accurate factual account in light of the latest research literature, but also to look at Russian interpretations and the role they have played in the recent Russian debate over the European security order.

The Napoleonic Wars provide a good jumping-off point. The Tilsit Peace Treaty of 1807 signed by Alexander I and Napoleon is an intriguing historical event, not least because it resembles the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, and can also serve as a reference point for any present bilateral peace deals between Russia and Western powers. Russia initiated the peace talks because the French cavalry had reached the Prussian-Russian border in Tilsit (Sovetsk) and the Russians were not prepared to fight after they had been defeated by the French in the Battle of

Friedland (near today's Kaliningrad). Although Alexander had already stymied plans for a far-reaching peace system in Europe based on enlightenment thinking, at Tilsit the primary object was an honourable peace for Russia (Rey, 2012, p. 154, 181). Alexander apprised Napoleon of the fact that an alliance between France and Russia would 'ensure the happiness and tranquility of the world' (quoted in Cavendish, 2007). Napoleon concurred because he saw the opportunity to stabilise his dominant position in central Europe and isolate Britain. The peace talks between the emperors, famously conducted on a raft in the middle of the boundary river, led to a treaty in which Russia agreed to join the blockade aimed at destroying Britain's commerce by closing its ports to British ships and neutral ships engaged in British trade. Alexander also pledged to wage war against Sweden and to force it to join the continental system. Although Alexander was relieved about the outcome of the summit, many Russians regarded France and the alliance with Napoleon with suspicion.

Indeed, the Tilsit Treaty soon became unpopular in Russia. Although Russia succeeded in conquering Finland from Sweden, domestic pressure grew because of trade restrictions and the resulting economic losses. Two years after the treaty, Alexander opened Russian ports to neutral ships, as he started to believe that no treaty with Napoleon would last. This led Napoleon to declare war against Russia and invade it in June 1812 – against the advice of his generals. The rest is history.

Although the Tilsit peace treaty was viewed as being tantamount to treason at the time, it is much more positively assessed in contemporary Russia. For example, Russian Academy of Sciences historian S. N. Iskyul (2015) wrote that Alexander I never wanted peace with France but signed the Tilsit treaties only to gather strength for a new war. The traditional view that the Continental Blockade caused an economic crisis for Russia has also been challenged recently (Tchoudinov, 2015).

After Napoleon was defeated, Russia – or rather Alexander I – became the driving force in negotiating and creating a new European security order at the Congress of Vienna. His intentions are often depicted as admirable in Russian historiography: 'He wished that all men could help each other like brothers, assisting one another in their mutual needs, and that free commerce could be the underlying bond of society', but it was also said that he 'lacked the necessary conviction and determination' (Zamoyski, 2008). Despite some liberal principles, the aim was conservative, namely to restore peace and establish a balance-of-power system in Europe, to prevent France from rising to a dominant position again, to contain nationalism and to manage emerging crises in concert with the other European powers (see, e.g. Kissinger, 1957; Kimerling Wirtschafter, 2015; Mitzen, 2013). Moreover, the congress discussed values based on the Christian faith, which were close to the heart of the Russian Tsar. Alexander's initiatives led to the establishment of the Holy Alliance, a multilateral treaty between the leaders of Russia, Prussia, and Austria. The Concert of Europe, by contrast, was a less ideologically driven alliance of the great powers – Austria, Prussia, Russia, the United Kingdom as well as France – which focused on international conference diplomacy to manage emerging crises.

It is little wonder that the Congress of Vienna and the European great-power concert is very often seen as the epitome of a functioning European security system in Russia. As Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (2016) put it, 'Russia became a saviour of the international system' at the Vienna congress, the formation of which 'led to development of the continent without serious military conflicts for 40 years.' Sergey Karaganov (2015), one of the

leading foreign-policy pundits in Russia, has elevated the Vienna system as something worth emulating. He stresses that the main reason why the Congress of Vienna worked was that the postwar arrangement was relatively fair and did not humiliate France in defeat. Another prominent expert, Fyodor Lukyanov (2014), nostalgically believes that the nineteenth-century concert system bears something of a resemblance to the lost city of Atlantis. For him, the Ukraine crisis is 'indicative that what is needed is precisely a genuine professional diplomacy in the spirit of the nineteenth century, a diplomacy that is familiar from textbooks but whose actual practice has been virtually forgotten.'

In these interpretations of history, too much weight may be given to the importance of the Congress of Vienna, however. After all, the settlement was 'less carved in stone than might seem the case' (Vick, 2014, p. 333). Moreover, the congress system failed because memories of the war faded and national rivalries as well as the forces of nationalism and liberalism started to grow. The congress attempted to set up institutional cooperation but was based on ambiguities, and the institutional structure was flimsy. It was followed by a more informal concert system that did not aspire to be a governing body (Jarrett, 2014, pp. 363–369). Undeniably, the congress system was successful in managing many crises and preventing a major war between the great powers. On the other hand, it legitimised military measures against otherwise peaceful nationalist uprisings. Hence, the track record of the congress system is more mixed and not the unmitigated success story that many Russians politicians and pundits make it out to be.

The Crimean War (1853–56), pitting an alliance of the Ottoman Empire, France, Britain and Sardinia against Russia, was the first major conflict in Europe after the Napoleonic Wars. From the Russian perspective, still often expressed today, the other powers wanted to weaken Russia and prevent it from expanding to the East and South. In Russia, the war is also seen as an outcome of a clash of civilisations because Russia's right to protect the Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire was at stake (Vakulova, 2016). Russian historians hold that the Paris Peace Treaty that ended the war destroyed the Vienna system, created an imbalance in Europe and generated opportunities for unpredictable political improvisation, which ultimately led to WWI (Sidorov, 2016). The terms of the peace after the Crimean War were harsh, but Russia was capable of negotiating some substantial changes in order to 'save the dignity of the country' (Temperley, 1932, p. 401). The West was not unified: France was hoping for rapprochement with Russia whereas 'Britain demonstrated her immutable enmity to Russia' (Baumgart, 1981, p. 203). Although the war is often seen by Western historians as a useful trigger for Alexander II's modernisation efforts in Russia, contemporary Russian historians seldom emphasise Russia's weakness. Quite the opposite, the war is seen not as a defeat but as a moral and religious victory in a conflict that was fought for a just and honourable cause against the West (Figes, 2010, p. 492). Moreover, parallels between the post-Crimean War context and the post-Cold War setting are often acknowledged. Foreign ministers Primakov, Ivanov and Lavrov have all regarded Gorchakov as a source of inspiration and a restorer of Russian great-power status by conducting a flexible foreign policy (Glasser, 2013; Splidsboel-Hansen, 2002). It is also worth noting here that Gorchakov recognised wider interests. In fact, Russia was in the forefront of developing humanitarian law at the time, for example initiating the Saint Petersburg Declaration of 1868 renouncing the use of explosive bullets and later international peace conferences concerning disarmament, the laws of war and the peaceful settlement of disputes (Multatuli, 2017).



Russia was not part of the Versailles Peace Treaty which ended the First World War in 1919, although 'the Russian question' was part of the discussions (Kennan, 1960/61). Lenin (1920) strongly condemned the treaty, not so much because Russian interests were ignored, but because 'Germany cannot exist from the economic standpoint following the Peace of Versailles' that was imposed upon it. Although the goal of the Bolsheviks was world revolution, the Soviet Union subsequently became a champion of a collective security system in Europe (Haslam, 1984). The most famous figure advocating a treaty system geared towards the peaceful resolution of conflicts and disarmament was the diplomat and subsequent foreign minister, Maxim Litvinov, who was instrumental in making the Soviet Union a party to the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928. The system, however, proved weak when German aggression grew. Still, from the Russian point of view, as Lavrov (2016) has argued, the policies of Great Britain and France were short-sighted and anti-Russian, so they too should be blamed. The fact that Russia was not a party to the Versailles Peace Treaty is seen as another shortcoming (Utkin, 2009). From the perspective of the present-day discussion in Russia, the lessons to be learnt from Versailles in 1919 are that the defeated should not be treated too harshly, and that Russia should not be excluded from the negotiating table.

The security system created after the Second World War is another much-discussed historical precedent. The Congress of Yalta in February 1945 is the famous point of reference here – 'one of the most powerful in Russian historiography' (Sakwa, 2016, p. 13). Hosted by Joseph Stalin, the two other participants were US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The purpose was to discuss what shape the European security system should take, but the focus was really on the fate of Germany rather than that of Eastern Europe. Moreover, the Soviet Union promised to join the war against Japan in the Pacific theatre, which was the main goal of the United States. Indeed, it is a frequent misconception that the parties aimed to divide Europe into spheres of influence. That did not happen. The British were not willing to agree to granting Stalin a free hand with regard to Poland, although discussions on how power would be shared in Eastern Europe had been held between the Soviets and the British earlier. While Churchill had already accepted the Curzon Line in principle, he still hoped that the Polish exile government in London would be somehow involved in determining the future of Poland (Harbutt, 2010, p. 286). Stalin insisted that the border changes in eastern Poland were non-negotiable and stressed that the Polish government should be amicable towards the Soviet Union. He nevertheless promised that free elections would be held in Poland after the war. The promise was not worth much as the Red Army had already occupied the country and much of Eastern Europe (Mastny, 1979). The 'Yalta system' effectively emerged only after the war when the Western allies recognised the communist-led governments in the Eastern European states.

The Yalta agreement duly appeared to be a classic trade-off between the parties. Yet historians have debated how good the trade-off was from the Western point of view. Critics have pointed out that the Soviets would likely have joined the war against Japan in any case and, when they did so, as agreed at Yalta three months after the surrender of Germany, it was when the war was already over in practice. Moreover, if the promise of free elections was part of the deal, it was a promise that was not kept. There was, however, the collective aim of showing unity – 'a harmonious image of the meeting – though for very different reasons': Roosevelt's reasons were more ideological and

Stalin's more pragmatic (Harbutt, 2010, p. 286). Yet the meeting was not devoid of shared moral principles: Stalin reiterated that the Soviet Union had suffered more than the other allies as a result of the war, and should therefore have a greater say in the peace negotiations, a sentiment with which the Western leaders largely concurred.

The Yalta Conference is regarded as a success by many Russians today, as it created a lasting peace. If there is nostalgia for Vienna, there is a certain nostalgia for Yalta, too. Putin (2015) has regarded Yalta as an exemplar of building a coalition of anti-terrorist forces in today's world in the same way as 'the countries that defeated Nazism united in their efforts to lay solid foundations for the post-war world order.' At Valdai 2014, Putin (2014) said that 'if there is a will, we can restore the effectiveness of the international and regional institutions system'. He contended that,

we do not even need to build anything anew, from scratch; this is not a "greenfield", especially since the institutions created after World War II are quite universal and can be given modern substance, adequate to manage the current situation.

In a speech at the UN General Assembly in 2015, Putin (2015) argued that the UN must be consistent with the 'natural transformation' of the world, but considered attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the United Nations as extremely dangerous. For Lavrov (2016), the Cold War system was not perfect because it was based on rivalry, although it nevertheless guaranteed peace. In his view, the security order based on the division of spheres of interest between the blocks was sustainable, but as soon as the USSR collapsed, chaos emerged again in international politics.

To sum up, no clear pattern of Russian thinking and policy regarding the international order is apparent other than the emphasis on its own great-power status. However, strategies and diplomatic styles have varied. Russia has displayed a more collective interest in terms of 'milieu goals', as was the case at the Congress of Vienna, as well as more narrowly defined self-interests in terms of 'possession goals', as at Yalta. Hence, the degree of collective interest does not directly depend upon Russia's relative power position since in both cases Russia was near the peak of its relative power in the international system. When weak, Russia has sometimes focused on possession goals, as after the Crimean war in 1856, but it could also adopt a wider 'milieu' perspective, for example when Gorbachev was engaged in negotiating the terms of the post-Cold War order, to which I will turn now.

#### **4. The emergence of the post-cold war security order in Europe and Russia**

At the heart of contemporary debates about a new security order in Europe is the simple but important question: what went wrong with the post-Cold War order? There is a general understanding that the order created at the end of the Cold War has not worked perfectly, but there are deep disagreements concerning the roots and key factors leading to this failure, not to mention how to remedy the situation. Competing narratives have been created and recreated (Zellner, 2017). Historians are still getting up to speed on this era, partly because most of the key archives are still closed (and internet sources are scarce). Reasons for revisiting the era, particularly the years 1990–94 before the first round of NATO enlargement, are therefore abundant.

From the Russian perspective, the immediate post-Cold War years represent an era of weakness that the Western powers exploited. The 1990s are painted in negative terms,

both with regard to domestic politics and external relations, standing in stark contrast to the Putin era. Yet the purpose is also to point the finger at the West. As Lavrov (2010) argued,

it is necessary to analyse the “family affairs” in Europe, and reassess a lot of things, though not in terms of the euphoria and triumphalism of the early 90s, but on the basis of sober analysis of the real consequences of what has occurred in the past twenty years.

In Lavrov’s (2016) view, ‘there was a real chance to overcome the intra-European schism and turn the dream of a common European home into reality.’ However, the order did not take account of Russia’s interests, which is why Russia now refuses to obey those rules. As Lukyanov (2018, p. 22) puts it, ‘The order established after 1991 was not a natural continuation of the agreements that secured peace and stability in Europe during the last years of the Cold War. So, Russia did not view the realities that emerged after the breakup of the Soviet Union as immutable, nor did it consider its actions with regard to neighbouring countries (created after the concerted decisions of the 1970s and 1980s) a violation of the earlier accords.’

There was no single peace conference bringing the Cold War to an end but many summits between the Soviet and US leaders, as well as bilateral and multilateral meetings with West Germany that can be seen as substitutes for a large peace conference (Sarotte, 2009). One of the crucial meetings was held in Malta in December 1989 between Presidents Bush and Gorbachev. At the summit, Gorbachev rejected the idea that democracy and human rights were based on Western values and regarded them as ‘our values, too.’ Gorbachev described his vision of Europe where the realisation of universal human values should become the primary goal, while the choice of this or that political system ought to be left to the people of any given country. Gorbachev also hoped for the dissolution of the military blocs and suggested that the Warsaw Pact and NATO should become political organisations rather than military ones.

Another important meeting was the multilateral Paris CSCE Summit in November 1990, which many observers regard as the symbolic peace conference ending the Cold War (see, OSCE Network, 2017). It was originally based on Gorbachev’s initiative, which he raised in Rome in December 1989 when visiting Italy and the Vatican. The United States did not embrace the idea of a new CSCE summit at first, and remained sceptical as to whether there was sufficient substance to justify it. Washington eventually agreed to the summit partly because the allies seemed to support it and the United States regarded it as an opportunity to strengthen the principles of free elections and economic liberty. During the preparations, the US remained only semi-committed, however. One sign of this was the unwavering US preference for a two-day meeting instead of three days.

The preparations for the summit were conducted in a working group led by Swedish, Swiss, and Finnish diplomats. The Soviet Union, the United States as well as the European Community (EC) provided several drafts for the process. Interestingly, the divisions were often not between the Soviet Union and the West but between the United States and the EC (and/or France). The texts drafted by the Soviet Union and the US regarding the values were to a large extent identical, but the US put more weight on economic liberty. Washington also wanted ‘the essential role which the North Atlantic Alliance has played and will continue to play in the preservation of peace and security in Europe’ to be recognised by the participating states. The Soviet Union in turn wanted to have it

explicitly noted that 'the problems of the states who have embarked on the road to democracy will be specially taken into account.' Moreover, the Soviet Union wanted to strengthen the CSCE and establish a more permanent institutional structure for it, but Moscow did not have any concrete proposals and this debate was therefore deferred to the 1992 summit.

Interestingly, the biggest bone of contention in the preparations for the summit was not related to any abstract values or principles, but to the status of the delegations representing the Baltic states, who wanted to attend the summit as observers. The Soviet Union vetoed this on the basis that observer status was only reserved for independent states. After some diplomatic bickering, a compromise was reached. The Balts were invited as guests of the hosts and were able to enter the conference building, but were only permitted to follow the meeting in a separate room. When the conference started, Gorbachev nonetheless refused to accept this solution and threatened to leave if the Balts were in the same building. As a result, the French hosts had no choice but to renege on the promised entry for the Baltic delegations.

When French President François Mitterrand (1990) opened the conference, he expressed the wish that it would be 'an anti-Congress of Vienna, since round this table we have neither victors nor vanquished but 34 countries in equal dignity.' Gorbachev (1990) in turn declared that 'We are entering into a world of new dimensions in which universal human values are acquiring the same meaning for all and in which human freedom and well-being and the unique value of human life must become both the foundation and basis for universal security and the supreme criterion by which we measure progress.' The other heads of state basically repeated the same key words and then added what was important from their national perspective, be it regarding the Mediterranean, Latin America, sustainable development or national minorities.

The result of the summit was that the heads of state participating in the meeting adopted the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. The Charter declared the era of confrontation in, and division of, Europe over. Henceforth, relations would be founded on respect and co-operation. The ideas of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 had already heralded a new era of democracy, peace and unity in Europe. In Paris, the signatories pledged themselves to build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of their nations. Along with democracy, human rights including minority rights and fundamental freedoms as well as economic liberty formed the bedrock of the New Europe. The parties committed themselves to settling disputes by peaceful means and promoting disarmament. Moreover, they fully recognised 'the freedom of States to choose their own security arrangements.'

At the time, the leadership in Moscow regarded these as great achievements. For Gorbachev (1996, p. 548), the Paris conference 'heralded a new post-confrontational era in European history.' Deputy Foreign Minister Yuri Derjabin (1991), the head of the USSR delegation in the preparatory committee, underlined that the era of confrontation, enmity and mistrust on the continent had ended. The Paris Charter was 'a major success scored by the Soviet foreign policy and a new political thinking' and 'guaranteed a worthy place in a new Europe'. Derjabin also noted that 'preparations for Paris were marked by the unprejudiced attitude to the views of each other and the spirit of truly concerned efforts.' In retrospect, it is clear that the summit did not lead to a fundamental transformation of the European security structures that Gorbachev had hoped for. However, that was not known at the time and the shared understanding was that more time was

needed for major institutional reforms of the European security architecture. This was an outcome that suited the US well, as its agenda after German unification had become more conservative than transformative.

The key point here is that liberal values were not imposed on Russia in the early 1990s; rather, Russians had embraced them by themselves. As Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev (1992a) announced in one of his early communications, democratic principles would drive Russian foreign policy. Russian foreign policy was rather conciliatory towards the West. In fact, Moscow endorsed many Western positions on world conflicts, including the Gulf War and the Balkans. Importantly, this was not seen as contradicting Russian interests at the time. As Kozyrev argued, good relations with the West were possible because no developed democratic state could threaten Russia. Kozyrev may not have been representative of the overall Russian views in the early 1990s, but he nevertheless represented the Russian state.

It is also true that Russian foreign policy at the time had only limited leverage because of massive domestic problems. The national consensus was, however, that Russia was still a great power. The 1993 Foreign Policy Concept stated this explicitly and laid out several foreign policy priorities. The key priority was the post-Soviet space and the many Russians living in these newly independent republics. For the Russian opposition, including the military and the communists, the problem was not so much amicable relations with the West, but the fact that the Russian leadership seemed to give up their policy priorities in the so-called near abroad in order to appease the West (Arbatov, 1993). As early as autumn 1992, the idea emerged that Russia should seek international recognition for its role as defender of human and minority rights in the Baltic states against the systemic discrimination of ethnic Russians there and make the withdrawal of its troops contingent upon the treatment of Russians – known as the Karaganov Doctrine. This idea started to influence Moscow's foreign policy. Kozyrev's mock speech at the CSCE Stockholm meeting in December 1992 already contained all the elements of a split with the West, although NATO expansion was not yet on the agenda. In his Stockholm speech, Kozyrev (1992b) stated that 'The space of the former Soviet Union cannot be regarded as a zone of full application of CSCE norms. In essence, this is a post-imperial space, in which Russia has to defend its interests using all available means, including military and economic ones.'

Another indication of such changes in Russian policy came in March 1993 when Defence Minister Pavel Grachev announced that the withdrawal of Russian troops would be suspended because of the social conditions and violations of human rights in the Baltic states. Moscow insisted that the Baltic states not only discriminated against the Russian-speaking population in their countries but also committed serious human rights violations against them as they were not automatically naturalised as citizens and therefore did not receive the right to vote. In April 1993, in one of the starkest interventions, Yeltsin accused Latvia of preparing the ground for ethnic cleansing. Some Russians explained that such comments were mainly for domestic purposes, but those who were responsible for the negotiations were nevertheless unwilling to move forward unless guarantees were given to safeguard the position of the Russian-speaking minority in the Baltic countries. The Russians also explained that the troops lacked housing and some USD230 million would be needed to construct military villages, as was the case for troops withdrawing from Germany. In reality, however, the troops were returning home of their own volition because the living costs had risen.

The Western politicians and diplomats mostly understood the housing problem, although they deemed the price tag for assistance rather high. They also believed that the Baltic states had not handled the issue of Russian minorities in the most elegant way, but it was clear that they were sovereign states and the issue of protecting the rights of minorities could not be linked to the troop withdrawal. Moreover, the missions of the Council of Europe, CSCE and UN had all come to the conclusion that there were no major violations of minority rights in the Baltic states (see, e.g. Budryte, 2005, p. 72). Although all of the missions suggested some recommendations to alleviate the existing problems, the international community could not put the Baltic states in a different position compared to other sovereign states. A clear gap between the Russian and Western interpretations of the facts on the ground emerged with regard to this issue. As British Prime Minister John Major, representing the presidency of the EC, wrote in his reply letter to Boris Yeltsin in December 1992, 'we do not believe that there are massive violations of human rights in the Baltic states.' Yet Major explained that the EC was concerned about community relations and wanted to maintain a close dialogue.

Thus, the Baltic troop issue contributed, perhaps for the first time since the end of the Cold War, to a growing sense of distrust and uncertainty about what Russia really wanted. As a presenter at the Western European Union (WEU) Institute for Security Studies described it, 'the problem seemingly lies in an inability on behalf of the Russian side to act consequently according to accepted political precepts and strategic goals.' In particular, the delayed ratification of the agreement concerning the troop withdrawal was 'counted as indicative for a lasting undecidedness on the Russian side about the final goals' and represented 'a significant lack of taking into account the overarching international consequences' (Lange, 1993). If the withdrawal of Russian troops was seen by the West as a litmus test of Russia's commitment to a cooperative security order honouring the sovereignty of other states, Russia passed it so-so.

On its own initiative, Russia – or sometimes the Russian military to be more precise – also started several peacekeeping operations in the area of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s. The first of these operations was conducted in June 1992 in Transnistria, where the 14th Army, led by Commander General Alexander Lebed, intervened in the conflict between the Moldovan government and the separatists. Further peacekeeping operations in the area of the former Soviet Union followed in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and Tajikistan. As these were not labelled Russian but rather CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) operations, Moscow claimed that it did not need a UN or CSCE mandate or additional international approval for the peacekeeping operations it led on CIS territory referring to the criteria of regional arrangements in the meaning of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. Observer missions were nevertheless set up by the UN in Abkhazia (UNOMIG) and in Tajikistan (UNMOT).

Even at the time, these operations were not necessarily seen as stabilising but as challenging the post-Cold War European order (Baev, 1993). Yet most Western observers were not accusing Russia of neo-imperialism. Rather, they concluded that Russia had mixed motivations: there was undoubtedly genuine Russian interest in quelling conflict and consolidating ceasefires in neighbouring CIS states, but it was also apparent that Russia was pursuing strong political and strategic interests in the former Soviet area (Allison, 1994, p. 43). Indeed, these operations were rarely condemned in the West and were endorsed if not tacitly supported (Hill, 2018, p. 6). A key concern was that Russian troops should



abide by the traditional UN peacekeeping standards of seeking the consent of all parties concerned, and remaining neutral and not part of the conflict (Shashenkov, 1994). At the end of 1993, British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd and Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev agreed on some underlying principles for Russian or CIS peacekeeping operations – such as strict respect for the sovereignty of the countries involved; an invitation from the government concerned and the consent of the parties to the conflict; commitment to a parallel political peace process; and a clear mandate setting out the role of the peacekeeping forces which should, wherever possible, be multinational in character (Allison, 1994, p. 41).

Despite some efforts to create a joint framework, Russia's right to conduct the peacekeeping operations was thus not openly contested and it was largely a non-issue in the relations between Russia and the West. At the time, the West did not have a clear policy towards the former Soviet Union. President Bush had supported stability in the area but accepted the newly independent states as a matter of fact. When Bill Clinton took office in 1993, the United States policy towards the post-Soviet space was still in a state of confusion. American government officials explained that the United States 'has no intention of getting involved in conflicts within the Russian Federation or intervening in domestic Russian politics', and no wish to 'make aid conditional on its judgment of Russian policy and behaviour toward other newly independent states' (Erlanger, 1993). Yet there were rumours of more intrusive plans with the aim of containing Russia, which had reached Moscow.

Indeed, in the Western debate, a distinction was emerging between the Eastern European states plus the Baltic republics on the one hand, and the other former Soviet states, 'the Newly Independent States', on the other. Russia's interest in containing disorder in the latter area of the 'near abroad' was often acknowledged by Western pundits. As one observer put it, 'Dismantlement of historical Russia is not necessarily a Western interest nor is Western interference there necessarily a prudent policy' (Pfaff, 1994). It was only in late 1993 that NATO enlargement started to emerge as an option in Washington (Asmus, 2002). Yet even at this stage, the US was reluctant to do anything that would humiliate Yeltsin, as it was believed that he was still the best guarantor of democratic developments in Russia. Paradoxically, France – rather than Russia – constituted a bigger challenge for NATO as a leading security organisation in Europe (see, e.g. Bozo, 2008; Cowell, 1991). No doubt, there were triumphalists in the West, generally more in the US than in Europe, but the triumphalist discourse started to become more prevalent only towards the end of the 1990s. Triumphalism did not explain the Western policy towards Russia or NATO enlargement, but rather the other way around: the adopted policy explains the surge in triumphalism.

During the latter half of the 1990s and early 2000s, Russian policymakers voiced their discontent with Western behaviour on several occasions, but it was also envisioning deepening security cooperation with the West, particularly in the context of the perceived global threat of terrorism. It is Vladimir Putin's (2007) famous speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007 that is often seen as the clearest critique of the whole post-Cold War system. As Putin stated: 'I am convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security.' Yet Russia did not have a clear plan for an alternative order and its principles. President Medvedev's (2009) European Security Treaty proposal affirmed the core security principles of

'indivisible, equal and undiminished security' and other phrases that were already part of the OSCE agreements. Upon closer inspection, the only exception was the Article in the treaty stipulating that countries are prohibited from enhancing their security in a way that actually harms that of another. This was seen as a clause preventing any further enlargement of NATO, but it was deemed too contentious and subjective by the Western counterparts, who wanted to preserve the principle that states are free to join the Atlantic Alliance if they wish (Weitz, 2012).

To sum up, the present Russian view of the post-Cold War era is based on the narrative that the international order was unipolar and was imposed on it due to Russia's weakness. In reality, however, Russia was not only taking but also making the international order in the years immediately following the end of the Cold War. Russia's position was undoubtedly weakened, but it supported most of the main principles of 'the new world order' without regarding the world as unipolar. Indeed, before the policy of NATO enlargement that started in 1993, the main axis of rivalry with regard to the European security architecture was between the United States and France, and not between Russia and the West. The US policy had been more conservative than transformative up to this point. The West generally had an ambivalent view of Russia at the time, criticising it for its sluggishness in withdrawing troops from the Baltic states, but tolerating the peacekeeping operations Russia conducted in the rest of the post-Soviet space.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has discussed Russia's role in and thinking about the European security order from a historical perspective, with a special focus on the immediate post-Cold War era. The aim has been to revisit and discuss the broader trends and contrast them with some prevailing stereotypical understandings of the 'Eternal Russia' format, rather than dwelling on historical details as such. The first conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that in the course of history, there has been more variation than continuity in Russia's policy towards the European security order. Russia has displayed both broader collective interests, as was the case at the Congress of Vienna, after the First World War and after the end of the Cold War, but it has also focused on more narrowly defined self-interests, as evidenced after the Crimean War in 1856 and following the Second World War. Moreover, these policies and policy changes cannot be reduced to Russia's relative power position. The history of Russia and the international order does not offer any simple congruity between weakness or strength and the content of its policy, although Russia's relative weakness often has resulted in more accommodative policies.

This article has also discussed Russia and the formation of the post-Cold War security order in Europe. This era has been at the heart of many attempts to both explain and justify Russia's present policy. The second conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that the post-Cold War security order in Europe was not imposed on Russia during the years immediately following the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's dissolution. Russia was weakened, but it was still shaping the order and accepted most of the main principles, as defined at the CSCE meetings and in other multilateral contexts, without any major stick or carrot being used by the Western powers. What in retrospect is seen as the emergence of the unipolar moment appeared much more confusing for contemporary observers. After the German reunification and before the decision to enlarge



NATO, the main dividing line in Europe was not between Russia and the West but between the US and France. Western perceptions of Russia were ambivalent: while some of its actions were criticised, its many operations in the privileged sphere of interest in the area of the former Soviet Union other than the Baltic states were at least tolerated if not endorsed.

Hence, the lesson of history is that one should be cautious about drawing any conclusive lessons from the past. Although historical myths may be conducive to cooperation as well as conflict, it is clear that views of Russian world order policy that are based on some transhistorical law-like driving forces are exaggerated and neglect the political context and the views and beliefs of the current leadership. Moreover, seeing the root causes of the ongoing confrontation between Russia and the West in some historical developments and events in the relatively distant past is unpersuasive and potentially counterproductive, as it shifts attention away from those problems that can be addressed here and now.

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